**+ The Vigil of Easter**

**April 3, 2021, 12:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m. April 4, 2021**

**Readings, Prayers, and Reflections**

*For ages, Easter has been celebrated around the time of the spring equinox, when people in the Northern Hemisphere have been eager for light after a long, dark winter. Scripture’s testimony that Jesus Christ is the light of the world led the church to associate Christ with light in its rituals and celebrations, including the lighting of a new Paschal Candle at the service of Easter Vigil. The church would gather in the night before Easter to tell the essential stories of the faith, recalling God’s faithfulness to God’s people Israel. The people would give thanks for the gift of Baptism and welcome siblings new to the faith, waiting, watching, and praying together for the coming light of the sun (Son) at dawn on Easter morning. The service would conclude with a celebration of the resurrection and the meal of Holy Communion.*

*In many years, St. Andrew’s Easter Vigil service has taken similar form, but our current context is not necessarily conducive to doing that well. So this year, as we wait in Vigil for Easter, we invite the congregation to focus on the basic premise of this night, waiting and watching with expectant hope, praying and giving thanks to God for the coming celebration of Easter, and the promise of salvation through the “passover” of Jesus Christ: his passion, death, and resurrection for the sake of the world. Unstructured time of prayer and devotion often benefits from additional guidance and resources, so we offer the following suggested Scripture readings, prayers, and reflections to assist you in keeping vigil, as we await the joy of Christ’s resurrection on Easter morning.*

**Scripture Readings**

 5For God alone my soul waits in silence,
 for my hope is from God.
 6God alone is my rock and my salvation,
 my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
 7On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
 my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
 8Trust in God at all times, O people;
 pour out your heart before God;
 God is a refuge for us.

 *Psalm 62: 5-8*

 1Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
 2LORD, hear my voice!
 Let your ears be attentive
 to the voice of my supplications!
 3If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
 LORD, who could stand?
 4But there is forgiveness with you,
 so that you may be revered.
 5I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
 and in God’s word I hope;
 6my soul waits for the LORD
 more than those who watch for the morning,
 more than those who watch for the morning.
 7O Israel, hope in the LORD!
 For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
 and with the Lord is great power to redeem.
 8It is the Lord who will redeem Israel
 from all its iniquities.

 *Psalm 130*

 6On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
 a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
 of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
 7And the Lord will destroy on this mountain
 the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
 the sheet that is spread over all nations;
 8the Lord will swallow up death forever.
 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
 and the disgrace of God’s people the Lord will take away from all the earth,
 for the LORD has spoken.
 9It will be said on that day,
 Lo, this is our God; we have waited for the Lord, so that God might save us.
 This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
 let us be glad and rejoice in God’s salvation.

 *Isaiah 25: 6-9*

7But as for me, I will look to the LORD,
 I will wait for the God of my salvation;
 my God will hear me.
 8Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy;
 when I fall, I shall rise;
 when I sit in darkness,
 the LORD will be a light to me.

*Micah 7: 7-8*

12Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

*John 8: 12*

18I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." 22Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

*John 14: 18-24*

16A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me. 17Then some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying to us, 'A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" 18They said, "What does he mean by this 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." 19Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, 'A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'? 20Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. 21When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. 22So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. 23On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

*John 16: 16-24*

1After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

*John 17: 1-5*

24For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

*Romans 8: 24-27*

**Prayers**

Oh, my Father, I have moments of deep unrest – moments when I know not what to ask by reason of the very excess of my wants. I have in these hours no words for Thee, no conscious prayers for Thee. Yet all the time Thou hast accepted my unrest as a prayer. I know not what I ask. But Thou knowest what I ask, O my God. Thou knowest that, because I am made in Thine image, I can find rest only in what gives rest to Thee; therefore, Thou hast counted my unrest for righteousness and hast called my groaning Thy Spirit’s prayer. Amen.

George Matheson (1842-1906)

O Thou God and Father of our Jesus Christ, we render Thee most humble and hearty thanks, that when he had descended into the grave, Thou didst not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption, but didst show unto him the path of life, and raise him from the dead, and set him ant Thine own right hand in the heavenly places. Grant us grace, we beseech Thee, to apprehend with true faith the glorious mystery of our Saviour’s Resurrection, and fill our hearts with joy and a lively hope, that amid all the sorrows, trials, and temptations of our mortal state, and in the hour of death, we may derive strength and comfort from this sure pledge of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Amen.

Benjamin Bartis Comegys (1819-1901)

Almighty and eternal God, you created all things in wonderful beauty and order. Help us now to perceive how still more wonderful is the new creation by which in the fullness of time you redeemed your people through the sacrifice of our Passover, Jesus Christ, who reigns forever and ever. Amen.

God of mercy, you wash away our sins in water, you give us new birth in the Spirit, and redeem us in the blood of Christ. As we prepare to celebrate Christ’s resurrection increase our awareness of these blessings, and renew your gift of life within us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Come, ye faithful, raise the strain

 of triumphant gladness!

God has brought God’s Israel

 into joy from sadness:

Loosed from Pharaoh’s bitter yoke

 Jacob’s sons and daughters,

led them with unmoistened foot

 through the Red Sea waters.

‘Tis the spring of souls today:

 Christ has burst his prison;

and from three days’ sleep in death

 as a sun has risen.

All the winter of our sins,

 long and dark, is flying

from his light, to whom we give

 laud and praise undying.

Now the queen of seasons bright

 with the day of splendor,

with the royal feast of feasts,

 comes its joy to render:

Come to glad Jerusalem,

 who with true affection

welcomes in unwearied strains,

 Jesus’ resurrection.

Amen.

John of Damascus (676 – c. 760)

**Reflections**

The Easter Vigil is one of my favorite liturgies, but tonight I am antsy… I have returned to my seat, am sitting, waiting, wondering if I should try to look like I am at prayer, and then a voice says to me, “You can stay here now.” Just five words, and I know that this voice is God and what God means is that there is ground beneath my feet again, that this is the beginning of sanity and steadiness; this is the beginning of a reshaped life.

 I don’t typically hear voices. In fact, this is the only time I have ever heard such a voice.

 I realize this is a bit of a liturgical cliché, hearing this promise of revivification at the Easter Vigil.

 And I realize that in five years, or ten years, or twenty years, I might not remember it so well, or trust it so much as I do right now.

 And I know that a simpler explanation is that the voice came from within me, that this was myself noticing and calling attention to the ways in which I had already begun to feel stable and steady and newly alive. But that explanation, while admittedly more reasonable than my knowing the voice to be God’s, is incomplete. Even on the days when I don’t believe in God, I still will tell you that one night, while sitting in church, I head God’s voice, naming a resurrection of sorts, telling me I could stay.

*Lauren F. Winner, Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis. New York: HarperOne, 2012. p.148-149.*

**Epilogue: Dark**

*Not knowing when the dawn will come I open every door.*

* Emily Dickinson

We have come to the final chapter, and I write it, appropriately enough, just before dawn on a Sunday morning. The house is quiet and the windows are dark. Dan snores in the room across the hall while I patter away at the keyboard, one last all-nighter before I finally send this book to the publisher. There’s this mockingbird that’s been singing from about midnight to three in the morning like she’s got the New York Philharmonic behind her, and I can’t for the life of me figure out what’s up with her, if singing loud into the night while the rest of the world roosts means she’s got some sort of malfunction of the brain or if it means she knows something important about the darkness that the rest of us don’t. *I wonder what she sees.*

But even the mockingbird has grown silent at this dark, heavy hour when the night stretches out like an inky ocean and it’s hard to remember the colors of the day. I find myself wondering if perhaps every generation of Christians has felt itself at the edge of this precipice, waiting for resurrection and worrying it might not come. Perhaps every pilgrim in search of church has wondered if it’s a lifetime of feeling this way through the dark, longing for light.

But if I’ve learned anything in this journey, both in writing this book and clumsily living its content, it’s that Sunday morning sneaks up on us – like dawn, like resurrection, like the sun that rises a ribbon at a time. We expect a trumpet and a triumphant entry, but as always, God surprises us by showing up in ordinary things: in brad, in wine, in water, in words, in sickness, in healing, in death, in a manger of hay, in a mother’s womb, in an empty tomb. Church isn’t some community you join or some place you arrive. Church is what happens when someone taps on your shoulder and whispers in your ear, *Pay attention, this is holy ground; God is here.*

Even here, in the dark, God is busy making all things new.

So show up. Open every door. At the risk of looking … like a mockingbird singing stubbornly at the night, anticipate resurrection. It’s either just around the bend or a million miles away. Or perhaps it’s somewhere in between.

Let’s find out together.

*Rachel Held Evans, Searching for Sunday, Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015. p. 257-258.*